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ABSTRACT

Based on Ken Kesey's novel "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that all works of art lend themselves to critical reviews; critical reviews consist of opinions and support for the opinions; and a critical review may compare and contrast a work in one medium to the same work in another medium. The main activity of the lesson involves students writing a critical review of the film based on the novel using the compare/contrast format. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Kirsten W. Rooks, teacher, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. All works of art lend themselves to critical reviews.

2. Critical reviews consist of opinions and support for the opinions.

3. A critical review may compare and contrast a work in one medium to the same work in another medium.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

The novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

The video release of the 1975 movie *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest,* directed by Milos Foreman and starring Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher

PROCEDURE:

1. After students have finished reading *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and you have conducted your final lesson on the work as a novel, initiate a general class discussion about novels that have been made into movies. Give students an opportunity to vent their opinions about when movies are more effective than novels and when movies do not capture the essence of a novel. Introduce the project of comparing and contrasting the movie version of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* to the novel.

2. Show the video *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* in parts as best fits your class schedule, giving students a chance between parts to discuss differences from and similarities to the written source of the video.

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3. Ask students to tell what they know about critical reviews in general. Help them realize the following:

- A reviewer may write about literature, movies, plays, exhibits of artwork, television shows, concerts, and other forms of art.
- Reviews appear in many venues: they are published in newspapers and magazines, orally delivered on television and radio, and can be found online.

4. Consider teaching or reviewing with your students that a review can have three parts:

- A summary or description of the work under review with a general statement of the reviewer's opinion about the work
- An evaluation of specific elements (for a movie, the elements include, among others, plot, script, acting, directing, camera work, scenery and costumes, and special effects)
- A conclusion that recommends the reader experience the work of art—or not

5. Add to the preceding that in reviewing a movie based on a novel, the reviewer may comment throughout the review on the success or failure of the adaptation. Remind students of the organizational options when writing a comparison-contrast:

- The block method, in which the writer gives all the information about one item (the movie) and then all the information about the other item (the novel)
- The alternating method, in which the writer focuses on one feature—say, humor—of *each* item before going on to focus on another feature—say, narrative technique

You may also remind students of the transitions that help a reader in a piece of comparison-contrast writing:

also
although
however
likewise
on the contrary
similarly

6. Advise students to apply the writing process to their reviews—going through prewriting (perhaps using a chart to collect notes about the movie), drafting (selecting a tone), and revising (making sure enough details support each generalization; replacing vague words such as *good, poor, weak,* and *strong*).

ADAPTATIONS:

If you have studied the novel with younger students, you may opt to show students one scene from the movie so that as a class you can compare and contrast it to the corresponding scene in the novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The main conflict in One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest is described in three different ways: as the struggle of the "sane individual vs. a crazy institution," "man vs. machine," and "a primeval, wild, unsocialized, anti-family form of masculinity vs. asexual women, institutions, and society that want to tame it." Discuss how these views differ from one another. Choose the theme that you think most accurately describes the conflict in the book and explain why.

2. Compare Ken Kesey's concept of the Combine—as demonstrated by President Eisenhower's policies, and corporate America's views on an efficient, well-organized, and compliant society—with Chief Bromden's concept of the Combine—an all-powerful, all-seeing secret group in the mental hospital, which watches and controls everything.

3. During the mid-1960s Kesey and his group, the Merry Pranksters, referred to those in their counterculture as being "on the bus." Describe what you think it means to be "on the us." Is this concept different in the late-1990s than it was in the mid-1960s? Who and what in today's world are "on the bus" or "off the bus?"

4. Kesey states that One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest helps the reader to "question reality" by "tearing away the fabric of what we've been told is reality and showing us something that is far more real." Do you agree with Kesey's analysis of his book? Select a scene or two that does or does not effectively accomplish this.

5. Describe Chief Bromden. Why do you think that Kesey chose him to be the narrator of the book?

6. The Merry Pranksters and the Grateful Dead epitomize the rebellious generation of the 1960s. Is there a contemporary equivalent to this phenomenon? Why or why not?

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate students' reviews using the following three-point rubric:

- **Three points:** very well organized and highly coherent review; more than enough examples to support overall opinion of the movie; no errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

- **Two points:** well-organized and coherent review; enough examples to support overall opinion of the movie; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

- **One point:** weakly organized review, lacking coherence in parts; not enough examples to support overall opinion of the movie; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics
You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining a minimum number of examples to be included to support the writer's overall opinion of the movie.

EXTENSION:

Nurse Ratched's Perspective
One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest is written from Chief Bromden's point of view. Have students choose a scene from the book, such as one of the group meetings or a confrontation between Nurse Ratched and McMurphy, and ask them to rewrite the scene from Nurse Ratched's point of view.

Treatments for Mental Health Patients
Instruct students to select and research a mental disorder—its causes, symptoms, and treatments. Possible disorders to research include the following:

- Clinical depression
- Manic depression (bipolar disorder)
- Schizophrenia
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Multiple personalities disorder

Students should compare today's treatments to those presented in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Ask students to present their findings orally and to use visual aids in their presentations.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Making Peace with the 60s
David Burner. Princeton University Press, 1996.
What did the 1960s mean? This book looks at this decade of civil rights and black power movements, political figures and the Cold War, student rebellion, and the war in Vietnam and analyzes the role and legacy of liberal politics in America.

Careers for Writers & Others Who Have a Way With Words
Robert W. Bly. VGM Career Horizons, 1996.
Do you want to portray the 1990s as Kesey did the 1960s? Reading this book will help you plan your writing career. Here is an introduction to book publishing, magazine and newspaper writing, careers in advertising and public relations, technical writing, writing for television and film, as well as freelance writing.

WEB LINKS:

American Dominance in the Works of Ken Kesey
An article about the theme of American dominance in Kesey's works.
http://www.bcsd.org/bhs/english/mag97/papers/kesey.htm

Literary Kicks
Very brief bio of Ken Kesey with some insights into his life and works.
http://www.charm.net/~brooklyn/People/KenKesey.html

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest - Memorable Moments
Memorable moments from the film are discussed, plus quotes and one photograph from the movie are included.
http://www.filmsite.org/onef.html

VOCABULARY:

combine
A combination especially of business or political interests. Also, a harvesting machine that heads, threshes, and cleans grain while moving over a field.
Context:
In Chief Bromden's mind, the world is run by an all-powerful, all-seeing secret group—the Combine.

existentialism
A philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines but centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for his acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad.
Context:
The Merry Pranksters and the hippies had some ideas of what existentialism was about.

lobotomy
Surgical severance of nerve fibers connecting the frontal lobes to the thalamus for the relief of some mental disorders.
Context:
Lobotomy—the ultimate horror in Psychiatry. During one procedure common in the 1940s, a long tool, very much like an ice pick, was driven through the top of the eye sockets into the brain, into the frontal lobes, and then wiggled about to disconnect the cellular wiring.

psychotic
Affected with a fundamental mental derangement characterized by defective or lost contact with reality.
Context:
Releasing mental patients from hospitals led to the bizarre phenomenon of having the street full of psychotic, untreated people.

schizophrenia
A psychotic disorder characterized by loss of contact with the environment, by noticeable deterioration in the level of functioning in everyday life, and by disintegration of personality expressed as disorder of feeling, thought (as in hallucinations and delusions), and conduct.
Context:
Both schizophrenia and LSD impair the brain's ability to distinguish whether impulses are coming from outside—out there in reality—or from inside—from the workings of one's own mind.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:

Benchmark 1: Makes connections among literary works based on theme (e.g., universal themes in literature of different cultures, major themes in American literature).

Benchmark 2: Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques (e.g., tone, irony, mood, figurative language, allusion, diction, dialogue, symbolism, point of view, style) on the overall quality of a work.

Benchmark 3: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Benchmarks: Identifies and analyzes the philosophical assumptions and basic beliefs underlying an author's work.

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: American history

Standard: Understands how the Cold War and the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics.

Benchmark:
Understands the social issues that resulted from U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War (e.g., the composition of American forces recruited in the war, why the Vietnam War contributed to a generational conflict and concomitant lack of respect for traditional authority figures).

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: behavioral studies

Standard: Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance, and physical development affect human behavior.

Benchmarks: Understands that expectations, moods, and prior experiences of human beings can affect how they interpret new perceptions or ideas.

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: behavioral studies

Standard: Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Benchmarks:

Benchmark 1: Understands that conflicts are especially difficult to resolve in situations in which there are few choices and little room for compromise.

Benchmark 2: Understands how various institutions (e.g., social, religious, political) develop and change over time (i.e., school teaching as well as school policies toward student behavior have changed over the years in response to family and community pressures), and how they further both continuity and change in societies.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
It became a bible of the 1960s counterculture and an Oscar-winning movie. Now hear author Ken Kesey describe the psychological and societal forces that inspired him to write this withering indictment of middle-class conformity.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. On what did Ken Kesey base the setting and characters for *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*?

2. In what two ways did Ken Kesey and his friends participate in the counterculture of the 1960s?

3. From whose point of view is the story told? What did he think he was up against in the institution?

4. What is the primary medical use of electroshock therapy, and how is it used by Nurse Ratched?

5. What effect did *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* have on the treatment of the mentally ill in the 1970s and 1980s?

6. What was the CIA's goal in creating powerful mind-altering drugs like LSD?

7. What happened to many of the people who were released from mental hospitals in the 1970s and 1980s?

8. What is Ken Kesey's challenge to society?

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One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. On what did Ken Kesey base the setting and characters for *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*?
In 1964 Ken Kesey worked as an orderly at the Oregon State Mental Hospital. All the characters except Randall P. McMurphy are based on real patients there.

2. In what two ways did Ken Kesey and his friends participate in the counterculture of the 1960s?
In 1964 Kesey and his friends created one of the first psychedelic communes, dubbed the Merry Pranksters. They also bought and traveled around in a brightly painted school bus named "Further."

3. From whose point of view is the story told? What did he think he was up against in the institution?
The story is told from the point of view of Chief Bromden, an alienated American Indian mental patient. He thinks he is dealing with the "Combine," an all-powerful, all-seeing secret group in the mental hospital, which watches and controls everything.

4. What is the primary medical use of electroshock therapy, and how is it used by Nurse Ratched?
The primary medical use of electroshock therapy is to treat severe or aggravated depression. However, Nurse Ratched uses it as a tool for control and discipline.

5. What effect did *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* have on the treatment of the mentally ill in the 1970s and 1980s?
The book led to a basic distrust of the system of state-run mental hospitals. This in turn led to increased outpatient treatment of the mentally ill and the depopulation of many large mental hospitals.

6. What was the CIA's goal in creating powerful mind-altering drugs like LSD?
The CIA hoped to use powerful mind-altering drugs like LSD to create a drug that could be used as a weapon.

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7. What happened to many of the people who were released from mental hospitals in the 1970s and 1980s?
Many of the residents of mental hospitals who were released in the 1970s and 1980s ended up homeless and wandering the streets or in prison.

8. What is Ken Kesey's challenge to society?
Ken Kesey's challenge to society is to question reality.

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